DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 237 241 PS 013 998

AUTHOR Downs, A. Chris; Reagan, Mary A.
TITLE Recognition, Development and Correlates of Self-Defined Physical Attractiveness among Young Children.
PUB DATE Apr 83
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Psychological Association (San Francisco, CA, April 6-10, 1983).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Age Differences; Observation; Parents; Peer Evaluation; *Physical Characteristics; *Preschool Children; Preschool Education; Preschool Teachers; Questionnaires; *Self Concept; Sex Differences; *Socialization; *Student Behavior; Student Evaluation
IDENTIFIERS *Physical Attractiveness; *Self Definition

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to investigate issues related to the development of preschool children's self-definitions of attractiveness. Research questions were (1) At what ages can children state a self-definition of attractiveness? (2) Are self-definitions temporally stable? (3) To what degree are children's self-judgments similar to judgments made of them by socializers? and, (4) What is the relationship of children's self-judgments of their attractiveness to their behavior and to verbal reports of their behavior? A sample of 140 subjects included equal numbers of male and female white preschool children, 3 through 6 years of age, and their parents, teachers, and peers. Self-definitions of attractiveness were obtained by asking children to rate themselves on a three-point scale while looking in a mirror; self-definitions were obtained again 2 weeks later. Children were also asked to rate their own behaviors and were observed for positive and negative behaviors during free play. Additionally, parents and teachers rated each child's behaviors, and peers rated each child's attractiveness. Results indicated that children at all ages seem able to report self-judgments of attractiveness and that such reports exhibit short-term stability. Other findings indicated that self-judgments were more related to verbal reports of behavior than to observed playground behavior and that age and sex differences exist in the relationship of children's self-judgments to judgments made of them by socializers and other adult raters. (RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED237241

RECOGNITION, DEVELOPMENT AND CORRELATES OF SELF-DEFINED PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS AMONG YOUNG CHILDREN

A. CHRIS DOWNS and MARY A. REAGAN

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON AT CLEAR LAKE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

A. Chris Downs

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PS 013998

PAPER PRESENTED AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE WESTERN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, SAN FRANCISCO, APRIL, 1983. FULL-LENGTH DRAFTS OF THIS PAPER WILL BE AVAILABLE BY SEPTEMBER 1, 1983 AND MAY BE OBTAINED BY SENDING A REQUEST TO DR. A. CHRIS DOWNS, BOX 88, PROGRAM IN HUMAN SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON AT CLEAR LAKE, 2700 BAY AREA BOULEVARD, HOUSTON, TEXAS 77058.

INTRODUCTION

PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS EXERTS A STRONG AND PERVASIVE INFLUENCE ON PERSON PERCEPTION, SOCIALIZATION AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS (E.G. ADAMS, 1977; BERSCHEID & WALSTER, 1974; LANGLOIS & STEPHAN, 1981). IN GENERAL, ATTRACTIVE PEOPLE TEND TO BE EVALUATED AND TREATED MUCH MORE POSITIVELY THAN UNATTRACTIVE PEOPLE. LANGLOIS AND STEPHAN (1981) AND ADAMS (1977) THEORIZE THAT THIS DIFFERENTIAL SOCIALIZATION PROCESS EMERGES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD. THESE THEORISTS ALSO ASSERT THAT OVER DEVELOPMENT CHILDREN ACQUIRE SELF-DEFINITIONS OF ATTRACTIVENESS THAT APPROXIMATE THE DEFINITIONS OF THEM BY SOCIALIZING AGENTS AND, IN TURN, BEGIN TO EMIT BEHAVIORS CONSISTENT WITH THEIR SELF-DEFINITIONS IN A SELF-PROPHETIC MANNER.

EARLIER RESEARCH HAS DOCUMENTED THAT ATTRACTIVE AND UNATTRACTIVE CHILDREN <u>ARE</u> DIFFERENTIALLY SOCIALIZED BY PARENTS (E.G. TAPP & DOWNS, 1983), TEACHERS (E.G. DION, 1973) AND PEERS (E.G. LANGLOIS & DOWNS, 1979). HOWEVER, CHILDREN'S SELF-JUDGMENTS OF ATTRACTIVENESS REMAIN VIRTUALLY UNSTUDIED. OUR FOCUS HAS BEEN ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THESE SELF-JUDGMENTS AND ON THEIR CORRELATES TO ACTUAL AND VERBALLY-REPORTED BEHAVIOR. THE PRESCHOOL AGE WAS SELECTED FOR STUDY SINCE EARLIER THEORY AND RESEARCH SUGGESTS THE EXTREME IMPORTANCE OF THIS PERIOD IN THE INFLUENCE OF ATTRACTIVENESS (E.G. ADAMS, 1977; BERSCHEID & WALSTER, 1974; LANGLOIS & DOWNS, 1979; LANGLOIS & STEPHAN, 1981).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. AT WHAT AGES ARE CHILDREN CAPABLE OF STATING A SELF-DEFINITION OF ATTRACTIVENESS?

2. ARE CHILDREN'S SELF-DEFINITIONS TEMPORALLY STABLE?

3. TO WHAT DEGREE ARE CHILDREN'S SELF-JUDGMENTS SIMILAR TO JUDGMENTS MADE OF THEM BY SALIENT SOCIALIZERS?

4. WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP OF CHILDREN'S SELF-JUDGMENTS TO:

   A. OBSERVED BEHAVIOR?

   B. VERBAL REPORTS OF BEHAVIOR?

METHOD

THE SAMPLE INCLUDED 140 WHITE PRESCHOOLERS (AGES 3-6; HALF FEMALE), THEIR PARENTS, TEACHERS AND PEERS. SELF-DEFINITIONS OF ATTRACTIVENESS WERE OBTAINED BY ASKING CHILDREN TO RATE THEMSELVES (WHILE LOOKING IN A MIRROR) ON A 3-POINT SCALE. SELF-DEFINITIONS WERE OBTAINED AGAIN TWO WEEKS LATER (TO ASSESS TEST-RETEST RELIABILITY). IN SEPARATE TESTINGS, CHILDREN WERE ALSO ASKED TO RATE THEIR OWN BEHAVIORS (E.G. SHARING, HITTING) AND WERE OBSERVED DURING FREE PLAY FOR FREQUENCIES OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE BEHAVIORS. PARENTS AND TEACHERS RATED EACH CHILD'S BEHAVIORS USING A 40-ITEM QUESTIONNAIRE INTO WHICH ATTRACTIVENESS RATINGS WERE EMBEDDED. PEERS RATED EACH CHILD'S ATTRACTIVENESS USING DION'S (1973) PEER NOMINATION STRATEGY.

RESULTS

ORGANIZED BY RESEARCH QUESTION:

1. CHILDREN AT ALL AGES STUDIED STATED AN ATTRACTIVENESS SELF-JUDGMENT. MOST CHILDREN SELF-CLASSIFIED AS HIGH OR MODERATELY ATTRACTIVE. A SIZEABLE MINORITY, 17%, INDICATED THAT THEY WERE LOW IN ATTRACTIVENESS.

2. ACROSS THE TWO-WEEK TESTING PERIOD TEST-RETEST RELIABILITIES FOR SELF-DEFINITIONS WERE HIGH, $\underline{M}\ \underline{r} = .61$. THIS SUGGESTS THAT PRESCHOOLERS' ATTRACTIVENESS SELF-JUDGMENTS ARE RELATIVELY STABLE OVER TIME.

3. SEE TABLE 1. CORRELATIONS OF CHILDREN'S SELF-JUDGMENTS WITH JUDGMENTS MADE OF THEM BY SALIENT SOCIALIZERS AND ADULT RATERS REVEALED DIFFERENCES BY AGE AND SEX OF CHILDREN:

   3-YEAR-OLD BOYS- STRONG CORRELATIONS WITH ADULT RATERS ONLY

   3-YEAR-OLD GIRLS- STRONG CORRELATIONS WITH TEACHERS AND FEMALE PEERS

   5-YEAR-OLD BOYS AND GIRLS- NO SIGNIFICANT CORRELATIONS

4. SEE TABLE 2. ANALYSES OF OBSERVED PLAYGROUND BEHAVIOR AS A FUNCTION OF AGE, SEX AND SELF-JUDGED ATTRACTIVENESS OF CHILDREN YIELDED ALMOST NO EFFECTS DUE TO ATTRACTIVENESS

5. SEE TABLE 3. ANALYSES OF CHILDREN'S VERBAL REPORTS OF BEHAVIOR AS A FUNCTION OF AGE, SEX AND SELF-JUDGED ATTRACTIVENESS OF CHILDREN YIELDED NUMEROUS RESULTS. HIGHLY ATTRACTIVE CHILDREN REPORTED HIGHER FREQUENCIES OF STAYING NEAR THE TEACHER, RUNNING AND HITTING. CHILDREN WHO BELIEVED THEMSELVES TO BE LOW IN ATTRACTIVENESS REPORTED GREATER LEVELS OF FEAR. ATTRACTIVENESS X SEX INTERACTION EFFECTS REVEALED THAT BOYS WHO WERE HIGH OR MODERATE IN ATTRACTIVENESS REPORTED HIGHER LEVELS OF FIGHTING, HURTING OTHERS AND SCARING OTHERS. AMONG GIRLS, THOSE LOW IN ATTRACTIVENESS REPORTED HIGHER LEVELS OF FIGHTING.

DISCUSSION

1. CHILDREN DO INDEED SEEM CAPABLE OF REPORTING A SELF-JUDGMENT OF ATTRACTIVENESS.

2. CHILDREN'S ATTRACTIVENESS SELF-REPORTS ARE TEMPORALLY STABLE OVER A SHORT TIME SPAN.

3. SELF-DEFINITIONS ARE GENERALLY UNRELATED TO THOSE OF SOCIALIZERS WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE SELF-DEFINITIONS OF 3-YEAR-OLD GIRLS.

4. IRONICALLY, SELF-JUDGMENTS SEEM UNRELATED TO OBSERVED PLAYGROUND BEHAVIOR. RATHER, THESE SELF-JUDGMENTS ARE MORE RELATED TO VERBAL REPORTS OF BEHAVIOR.

5. RESULTS SUGGEST THAT CHILDREN'S SELF-JUDGMENTS MAY BE IMPORTANT IN UNDERSTANDING THE OVERALL INFLUENCE OF PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS IN THE SOCIALIZATION PROCESS.

TABLE 1

CORRELATIONS OF SELF-JUDGMENTS OF ATTRACTIVENESS WITH JUDGMENTS MADE BY SALIENT SOCIALIZERS AND ADULT RATERS

		3-YEAR-OLDS		5-YEAR-OLDS	
SOCIALIZER	ALL SUBJECTS	BOYS	GIRLS	BOYS	GIRLS
TEACHER	.05	.12	.35*	-.12	-.16
MALE PEERS	.11	.20	.12	-.21	.14
FEMALE PEERS	.14	.08	.31*	.12	.02
MOTHERS	.04	.04	.02	-.12	.11
FATHERS	.03	-.07	.09	.11	-.11
ADULT RATERS	.16*	.48**	.11	.06	.01

*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$

TABLE 2

ANALYSES OF OBSERVED PLAYGROUND BEHAVIOR AS A FUNCTION OF SELF-JUDGED ATTRACTIVENESS

ATTRACTIVENESS MAIN EFFECTS

WATCH OTHERS: $F(2,90) = 4.56$, $p < .01$

MODERATELY ATTRACTIVE CHILDREN WATCHED OTHERS MORE THAN HIGHLY ATTRACTIVE CHILDREN

ATTRACTIVENESS X SEX EFFECTS

SHARE $F(2,90) = 2.97$, $p < .05$

BOYS: LOW > MODERATE, HIGH

GIRLS: HIGH > MODERATE, LOW

NO EFFECTS FOUND FOR:

PROXIMITY

TOUCHING

TALKING

HIT WITH OBJECT

HIT/PUSH

STAND

WALK

SIT

CRAWL

PLAY

SMILE

RECEIVE HELP

GROOM

TRANSPORT TOY

THROW

TABLE 3

ANALYSES OF VERBALLY-REPORTED BEHAVIORS AS A FUNCTION OF SELF-JUDGED ATTRACTIVENESS

ATTRACTIVENESS MAIN EFFECTS	F (2,113)	p <	DIFFERENCES
FEAR	3.75	.03	LOW > MODERATE
STAY NEAR TEACHER	2.88	.05	HIGH > LOW
HIT	4.97	.01	HIGH > MODERATE, LOW
RUN	2.92	.05	HIGH > LOW

ATTRACTIVENESS X SEX EFFECTS	F (2,113)	p <	DIFFERENCES	
			BOYS	GIRLS
FIGHT	3.59	.03	MOD, HIGH > LOW	LOW > MODERATE,HIGH
HURT OTHERS	3.28	.04	HIGH> MOD.> LOW	ALL =
SCARE OTHERS	2.93	.05	HIGH, MOD > LOW	ALL =